

## A BLACK LEOPARD, AN ORDINARY LEOPARD AND A GOOD BULL TSAING

BY

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Leopards were fairly plentiful round my camp and I had to keep a careful eye on my two bull terriers, especially when it got dark, to see that they were not carried off. The villagers residing in a small village of about twelve houses not far from where my camp was situated in the jungle, informed me that quite a number of their dogs, as well as some of their pigs and calves, had been killed by leopards. The pug marks of two leopards that had been seen in the vicinity of the village on being examined by me appeared to be about the same size; so I came to the conclusion that a couple of these animals must be hunting in pairs.

I had left my headquarters to go out into the wild on a month's shoot to see, as I had not shot anything for a long time, if I could account for a good bull Tsaing (*Bibos banteng birmanicus*) the true wild cattle of Burma, as well as bag a leopard or two. I was told that there were several herds and some good bulls among them. Some very fine solitary bulls had also been seen feeding on the neighbouring low-lying bamboo-covered hills and ridges, but that they were all very wary and difficult to get at, especially when lying up in thick cover during the heat of the day. Most sportsmen who have had any experience of Tsaing and Gaur (*Bibos gaurus*), are aware that a solitary bull gaur is much easier to stalk than a solitary bull tsaing. The success or otherwise of a stalk depends a good deal on whether the ground that is to be covered is damp or dry; whether one's trackers, and the sportsman himself are experts at the game; whether they understand the art of travelling through the jungle as noiselessly as possible until near enough to shoot the quarry in a vulnerable spot. What is of the utmost importance however is that the wind must be carefully tested and should be entirely in one's favour till the shot is about to be fired. I need not go into details of this kind as most sportsmen with any experience of big game shooting know how to cover the ground without making any noise when tracking up an animal. Needless to say the sportsman's sight and hearing should also be very good. When out after big game, my senses were always at the utmost tension especially when about to fire at an animal that I had been stalking, whilst I could invariably tread as noiselessly as a cat when moving through the jungle. Years of practice and experience of big game shooting brought my sense of smell, touch, hearing, sight and my tread to a very acute and highly developed condition.

My weapons on this shoot consisted of a single 500-bore high velocity rifle by Westley Richards taking a charge of 80 grains of cordite, a 423 Mannlicher Schoenauer magazine rifle, and a double 12-bore, hammerless ejector shot-gun with S,S,G. buckshot cartridges.

I have used many different kinds of weapons when shooting large and small game in Burma from the year 1887 to the end of the year 1940 and their use always gave me very great pleasure. Let me describe some of them in this article. Three of these weapons seldom, if ever, failed me when in a tight corner. They were a double hammerless 8-bore Paradox, a double hammerless 8-bore rifle and a single trigger 577 ejector rifle by Westley Richards which took a charge of 100 grains of cordite. The two 8 bores each took a charge of 10 drachms of black powder. Later on I came into possession of a single take down 577 cordite rifle by Westley Richards which took a charge of 100 grains of cordite. This was a very serviceable and perfect weapon. I could sprint a hundred yards carrying it easily in one hand as I ran to overtake any animal that I had wounded. Then I owned a double hammerless 303 Lee Enfield rifle, sighted up to 300 yards. This was a most accurate weapon for all thin-skinned animals such as sambar, serow, goral, barking deer, pig, wild dog. On several occasions I also accounted for several leopard and bear with this weapon, using soft nose as well as service bullets. What a wonderful weapon the 8-bore Paradox was to be sure. I seldom failed to bring down any animal with my first shot. The conical bullets used in the cartridges of this weapon were heavy and they invariably set up beautifully. Only on one occasion, did I fail to bring down at once a bull that I had fired at. I was walking alone ahead of my men along a ridge, on the water-shed on the top of the Yoma mountains, which overlooks Arakan and Thayetmyo District at a height of about 4,000 feet. Away down in the valley I could see the steamers coming up and down the Irrawaddy river on my right and on my left the sun setting with a glitter over the sea on the Arakan coast miles away. Then I came suddenly on a solitary bull gaur, a very large animal, which was walking in my direction along the ridge. When it saw me it stopped dead and threw up its head. The animal was then about 30 paces from me. I fired at what I took to be its chest with the Paradox, but the animal turned round as if on a pivot and galloped off at a great pace for a distance of about 400 yards as if it had not been hit. Then suddenly after hitting the burnt stump of a large tree it collapsed with a crash, stone dead. I found afterwards that my bullet had hit the animal's nose and after travelling down its gullet had lodged in its stomach after badly raking its lungs and internal organs. The bullet was afterwards picked out and handed to me by one of my men when the animal was being cut up. The double 303 Lee Enfield was, as I have stated before, a perfect weapon for most animals except elephant, tiger, gaur, and tsaing. As a matter of fact, it really was not quite good enough for leopard, sambar or bear. I got two bull gaur and a tigress also with it. Those were however special occasions and picked shots. In the case of the two gaur I used cartridges loaded with service bullets. The tigress was shot with a single cartridge and a soft nose bullet, the latter passing through both its lungs. It is not however, what a weapon will do on certain occasions, but what it should do on every occasion, and a good big 'un' is always better than a good little 'un'. I also possessed a beautiful 236 W.S.N. magazine rifle which accounted for a good many thin-skinned animals such as

serow, goral, pig, barking deer and wild dogs. I had at different times two double 12-bore hammerless ball and shot guns both of which took a charge of about  $4\frac{3}{4}$  drachms of smokeless powder. These weapons are all right when used in beats, when the jungle is being driven for such animals as bear, pig, sambar, leopard and barking deer, but they are not powerful enough for tiger, although I bagged the record tiger of Burma at Sinbo in the Myitkyina District using one of them. It was what is known as a 'Cosmos' ball and shot gun by Cogswell and Harrison but, as I have said before, it should never be used on a tiger, and certainly not on elephant, gaur or tsaing as the powder charge is quite insufficient. It is quite a different matter when a 12-bore magnum 'Explora' gun is used on some of the large animals as it is a very powerful weapon with a powder charge good enough to kill most animals.

One night at about 9-30 p.m., when about to turn into bed, a Burman hunter from a neighbouring village arrived at my camp to inform me that a leopard had attacked one of his dogs the same night at about 7-30 p.m. The dog had escaped with a nasty scratch along its back which it received as it leaped into the house. Although several persons had heard the dog yelp loudly once, no one had seen it or the leopard. I informed the *shikari* that I would see what could be done on the following day. Next day I decided to have a machan erected at a spot near a thicket about 250 yards from the village—a site which I had chosen before. I hung up a leg of a doe sambar, killed several days before by wild dogs, which my men had brought in. It was hung from a stout branch with a strong piece of rope, about ten to twelve feet from the ground. At about 5-30 p.m., armed with my 12-bore shot gun and S.S.G. cartridges and the 423 magazine rifle I entered the machan alone. It was not more than about eight feet above the ground. At about 7 p.m., when the light was just beginning to fade, a magnificent black leopard stepped out of the thicket and began walking slowly towards the bait, flicking its tail from side to side. When it got exactly beneath the bait, it stopped. The animal then began to sniff the surrounding air uttering a succession of peculiar purring sounds, after which it lay down on all fours in a crouching position as if about to spring on the meat hanging above its head. I did not wait to see any more and let the animal have one shot from the 423 with a soft nose bullet, which got it luckily through the vertebrae of the neck. The animal, on receiving the shot turned a complete somersault and remained perfectly still except for a few spasmodic movements of its tail. It certainly was a lucky shot to have hit it where I did, and I was just going to get down from the machan to inspect the dead animal when, to my utter surprise, two ordinary leopards sprang out of the same thicket. After trotting up to the dead animal together they sniffed at it once or twice and then looked up at the sambar's leg that hung so temptingly above their heads. After reading this some people might be inclined to think that I am drawing the long-bow and making up this yarn. Well believe it or not as you like. I finished off one of the two leopards with one shot from the choke or left barrel of my 12-bore shot gun. The choke took a number of the S.S.G. buck shot together which entered the brain of the animal through its left ear. The black leopard turned out

to be a very fine male measuring 7' 6½" in length. The second ordinary leopard bagged by me taped 7' 3" in length and, as it was the cold weather at the time, both animals had very fine coats. When the villagers and my hunters arrived on the scene and saw the black leopard they were very astonished but all of them agreed that this must have been the animal that had killed and carried off their calves.

Tsaing, the true wild cattle of Burma, are very fine game-looking animals for their size, a good bull often standing as high as seventeen hands at the shoulder. I have shot quite a number of old bulls during the past 50 years of my stay in Burma, some of them with very fine heads. I have found from the many experiences I have had with these fine animals that, when wounded or at bay at close quarters, they are never really as pugnacious or as dangerous to tackle as some of the solitary bull gaur (*Bibos gaurus*) that I have shot. In fact I have had more narrow escapes from death through being charged and struck by the horns of wounded gaur than from any bull tsaing. I do not believe either that a bull tsaing, although generally speaking a more active animal, can travel any faster when charging than a bull gaur. I am inclined to think in fact from the many experiences I have had, that a bull gaur when it means business, and is really charging after being wounded, usually travels much faster than a bull tsaing. To say also that a bull gaur seldom charges at all is utter nonsense, I have been charged by them on four separate occasions, two of which nearly finished me off. I have no recollection of ever having been charged in a business-like manner by a bull tsaing. Although I have been in several nasty situations with several wounded animals. I have always considered a wounded bull gaur to be very dangerous indeed when it is being followed up. There is not the slightest doubt about this in my opinion. Experience has shown me that a wounded gaur is more likely to charge a sportsman that is following him up than an unwounded animal, although I remember very well being charged on two occasions by two solitary bulls that had got my wind and had not even been seen or fired at by me. Some solitary bull gaur are of course more cantankerous and savage than others. It often depends on whether the animal is a cunning old stager, or a bull that has been made cantankerous and fierce through having been fired at and wounded frequently by Burman hunters using inferior weapons, or whether it has been attacked by tigers on different occasions and is therefore always on the look out for danger and ready to charge on hearing anything approaching it. I once shot a very savage old solitary bull gaur that was minus its tail, and blind of its right eye. I was tracking him on foot as he was about to cross the railway line into the Pidaung plain in the Myitkyina District of Burma. Some gangway linesmen, or railway coolies, coming along the line disturbed him, so he turned back along his tracks and was passing me at about 15 paces, I being on his right or blind side. I was using a single take down 577 rifle by Westley Richards burning 100 grains of cordite. He tried to get at me though floored him with my first shot—a soft nose bullet which passed clean through his body, but as I happened to be on his blind side, where he was unable to see me, I dropped him again with a second shot clean through his body, but as he struggled hard to regain his feet to get at me I killed him with a

third shot which got him in the neck. It took a lot of doing of course, and I thought at one time that it might be able to get at me. I certainly was a bit shaken when it was all over. I had opened out a fresh tin of twenty 577 cartridges that morning so they were fresh and in splendid condition. A twenty hand bull gaur sometimes takes a lot of lead before he can be properly accounted for, unless he is hit in the right place with the sportsman's first shot. I consider that next to a wounded tiger, and then a wounded leopard, no more dangerous animal can be followed on foot than a wounded bull gaur.

It is very difficult to choose the best bull tsaing when one comes upon a herd as there may be two or three good bulls equally worth shooting. It is necessary for the sportsman to bring a powerful pair of binoculars with him to discover at once which animal carries the best head. It does not necessarily follow that the biggest animal in a herd possesses the finest pair of horns. I have shot some very big gaur running up to 20 hands, and also some very large tsaing, and found that they had indifferent heads, whilst other animals, gaur of 18 and 19 hands, had very much finer heads. The same remarks apply to the size of the tracks of an animal that a sportsman may be following up. I have tracked several solitary bull gaur as well as tsaing that had enormous tracks and then found that their heads were most disappointing. This is the case however more often with gaur than with tsaing. I may be wrong of course, but the conclusions arrived at by me is that what an animal gained in the size of its body it seemed to lose in the size of its horns.

My men turned up one morning and informed me that they had come upon the tracks of a herd of about thirty tsaing and asked me whether I would follow them. I agreed to do this taking only my single 500-bore cordite rifle, which took a charge of 80 grains of cordite. After following up the tracks till about 6 p.m. we came upon the herd scattered over a ridge covered with dwarf bamboo jungle. Some of the animals were feeding on bamboo leaves, others were cropping the grass. I picked out with my binoculars two good bulls. They were standing alone together apparently doing nothing for they certainly were not cropping the grass or browsing off the bushes, or feeding on bamboo leaves. I could see them shake their heads occasionally and whisk their tails from side to side though there did not appear to be many flies about, it being then the cold weather, but a good many flies always follow herds of gaur as well as tsaing throughout the year. In the hot weather and beginning of the rains gad flies worry these animals dreadfully. I once came upon a solitary bull tsaing trotting along through the jungle. He passed without taking any notice of me, at a distance of only about ten yards, surrounded by a dense cloud of gad flies that were punishing him dreadfully, for he shook his head from side to side as he covered the ground. I killed him with one shot using an 8-bore rifle. The bullet passed through both his lungs.

Fortunately for my hunters and myself the wind was in our favour as we approached the two bulls standing alone. I only had two trackers with me. The fewer followers you have when following an animal the better, especially when approaching such wary animals as tsaing. Well to cut a long story short, I managed

to get within about forty yards of the two bulls and then let the one that appeared to have the better horns a raking shot forward through the small of the ribs with a soft nose bullet from the 500 bore. The animal stumbled and lurched forward slightly on receiving the shot as if it were coming down, but recovered at once and made off followed by the other bull. The rest of the herd dashed away in different directions on hearing the report of my rifle. It took my trackers and I another hour and a half steady tracking before we came up with the wounded animal, which beyond shaking its head and snorting at us, could not do anything as it had been rendered more or less *hors de combat*. I then finished the bull off with a second shot which perforated both lungs and brought him to the ground after he made a gallant effort to keep himself from collapsing. The bull's horns were well corrugated and taped 70 inches from point to point across the forehead. I saw the companion of the dead bull standing under a bamboo clump not more than 150 yards from where my trackers and I were standing, alongside the animal I had shot. I had no desire however to shoot another animal as I considered one good bull accounted for in a day's shoot was quite enough, in spite of my trackers' earnest request that I should shoot this animal also. All that Burman villagers, hunters, and trackers usually think of when they accompany a European sportsman on a shoot is how much meat they can become possessed of at the end of a shoot. Nothing would please them more than shooting half a dozen tsaing in a day and allowing to carry off all the meat.

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